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Singapore Premier's Charge Poses Serious Threat to CIA

Scandal Over Reported Bribery Attempt
Renews Efforts to Create 'Watchdog' Group

By NAT S. FINNEY
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The Central Intelligence Agency is now passing through another period of jeopardy in some ways more serious than the one it survived after the Cuban Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961.

On that occasion President Kennedy had no choice but to accept full responsibility.

The agency's present problem is how to defend itself against charges that its operatives attempted to "bribe" Premier Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore in 1960 without stripping the secrecy cover off an Asian operation that is still going forward.

Offer Is Denied

Premier Lee has made the CIA's problems trebly difficult by hints that agents who approached him during the last year of the Eisenhower administration were attempting to cover up their extra-curricular activities "a la James Bond."

When the State Department denied that any bribe was ever offered, Premier Lee read a letter purportedly sent him by Secretary of State, Rusk admitting the "bribery" attempt and apologizing for it. The State Department then confirmed that such a letter was sent to Premier Lee, and let the matter go at that.

But at least two influential members of Congress who have supported earlier moves to put the CIA under a "watchdog committee" are less inclined to let the matter drop.

Agency Has New Head

They are Rep. Zablocki (D., Wis.) a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Rep. Hardy (D., Va.) of the Government Operations Committee.

The matter has a special

seriousness now for two reasons: A new man, retired Admiral William F. Raborn Jr., heads the CIA and he is relatively untested in the perennial struggle of the agency to avoid congressional intrusion in its affairs. And President Johnson has never been through such a struggle.

Any defense of the CIA in the Singapore matter is complicated by some tricky questions about why Premier Lee chose late 1965 to dredge up an incident from 1960.

CIA Says Nothing

The superficial story out of Singapore is that Premier Lee, then a key native figure in the Singapore government, caught the CIA trying to penetrate his intelligence apparatus and that the CIA offered him \$3 million to keep quiet about the attempt.

In his belated disclosure of the incident (which, on the surface, would not be considered unusual in intelligence operations), Premier Lee coupled his blast at the U. S. with a declaration that he doesn't want any American "interest" in Singapore. This implied that the CIA still maintains an intelligence apparatus there.

This is neither confirmed nor denied by the CIA.

Avoid Accountability

But there is evidence that the agency is "in contact" with the key members of the Appropriations and Armed Service Committees on Capitol Hill that look after CIA interests on a strictly confidential basis.

There have been attempts in the past to "make the CIA accountable" for its expenditures to a special congressional committee, but congressional elders and the White House have contrived to head off any such

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